

The CIA's Secret Vietnam Study

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An official of the Central Intelligence Agency has suggested the possibility of "some kind of negotiated settlement" of the hostilities in South Vietnam.

According to the proposal, which was made public but not endorsed by Administration sources, the negotiated settlement would be based upon neutralization of the area.

Willard Matthias, a member of the CIA's Board of National Estimates, one of the highest units in the agency, was author of the suggestion in a 50-page working paper dated June 8.

Administration officials emphasized that it did not reflect official United States policy. It was made available apparently only because a copy was said to have been obtained by the Chicago Tribune, which indicated it planned to print excerpts.

'STALEMATE'

Matthias observed in his paper that there was "serious doubt that victory can be won" and indicated that, at best, "a prolonged stalemate" might be achieved.

Working papers of officials of the Central Intelligence Agency are almost never made public. It was believed, however, that when Administration leaders learned that a copy had fallen into the hands of a newspaper they feared some political use might be made of it.

It was felt that the views of a single official suggesting a possible negotiation might be incorrectly construed as the Administration's policy. Administration sources said it was then decided to make the paper public to demonstrate both that it was not a secret and that it was of a discursive nature.

When it was made available to the press it had a cover sheet signed by Sherman Kent, chairman of the Board

of National Estimates, stating that the paper had "general board approval, though no attempt has been made to reach general agreement on every point of it."

DESCRIPTION

A colleague of Matthias described the paper as a "think piece," typical of many which are distributed throughout the various agencies of government.

Qualified sources said, however, that while Matthias' views on negotiating a settlement did not reflect the official U.S. position, they were widely held in government and were the subject of recurrent official discussions.

In his paper entitled "Trends in the World Situation," Matthias wrote:

"The guerrilla war in South Vietnam is in its fifth year, and no end appears in sight. The Viet Cong in the South, dependent largely upon their own resources but under the direction and control of the Communist regime in the North, are press-

ing their offensive more vigorously than ever.

"The political mistakes of the Diem regime inhibited the effective prosecution of the war, which is really more of a political contest than a military operation, and led to the regime's destruction.

"The counter-guerrilla effort continues to flounder, partly because of the inherent difficulty of the problem and partly because Diem's successors have not yet demonstrated the leadership and inspiration necessary.

"There remains serious doubt that victory can be won, and the situation remains very fragile. If large-scale U.S. support continues and if further political deterioration within South Vietnam is prevented, at least a prolonged stalemate can be attained.

"There is also a chance that political evolution within the country and developments upon the world scene could lead to some kind of negotiated settlement based upon neutralization."